

Inclusion of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment

The 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) placed renewed emphasis on educating students with disabilities in less restrictive environments. In particular, the law encourages opportunities for children with disabilities to participate in general education settings and in the general education curriculum. Inclusion of children with disabilities in such settings is important because it raises expectations for student performance, provides opportunities for children with disabilities to learn alongside their nondisabled peers, improves coordination between regular and special educators, and increases school-level accountability for educational results.

- Between and 1986 and 1996, the percentage of children ages 6–21 with disabilities who were educated in regular classrooms increased substantially. For example, the percentage served in regular classrooms increased by nearly 20 percentage points, while the percentage served in resource rooms, separate classes, and separate residential facilities decreased.
- The types of environments in which children with disabilities are educated and the extent to which their educational environments have changed over time vary greatly by disability type. For example, in the 1995–96 academic year, about 89 percent of children with speech or language impairments were educated in regular classrooms, compared with about 10 percent of those with mental retardation. In addition, children with specific learning disabilities experienced the greatest increase in service in regular classrooms (27 percentage points), and those with deaf-blindness experienced the smallest increase (4 percentage points; see supplemental table 20-1).
- There has been a general downward trend in the percentage of children with disabilities who were educated in resource rooms and separate classes, but this pattern does not hold true for children with all disability types. Among children in 8 of the 12 disability categories, where disabilities tend to be more severe, placements in either resource rooms, separate classes, or both increased between 1985–86 and 1995–96 (between 1991–92 and 1995–96 for autism and traumatic brain injury). Even so, children in many of these 8 disability categories show relatively high decreases in placement in separate facilities (see supplemental table 20-1).

Percentage distribution of students with disabilities ages 6–21* according to the educational environments in which they were educated: Academic years ending 1986–96

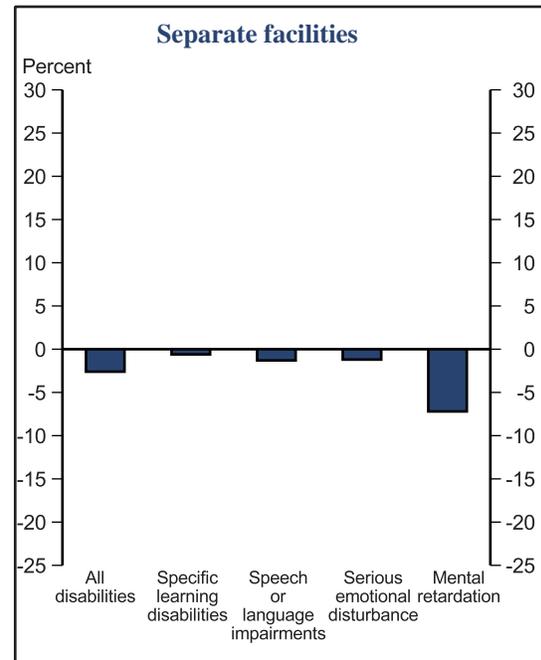
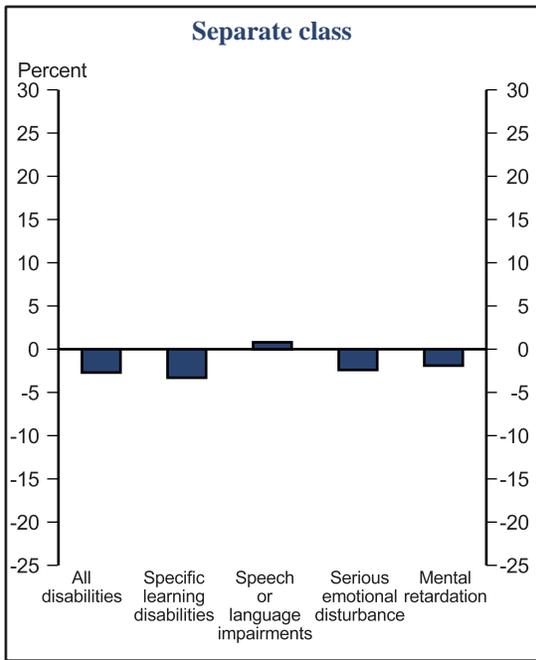
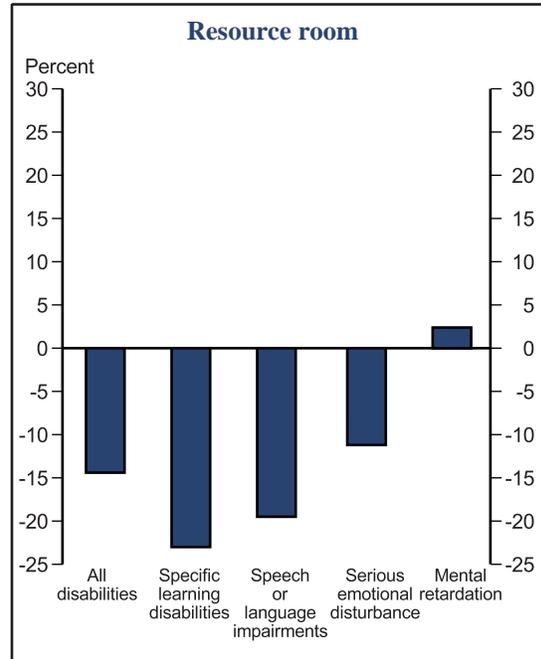
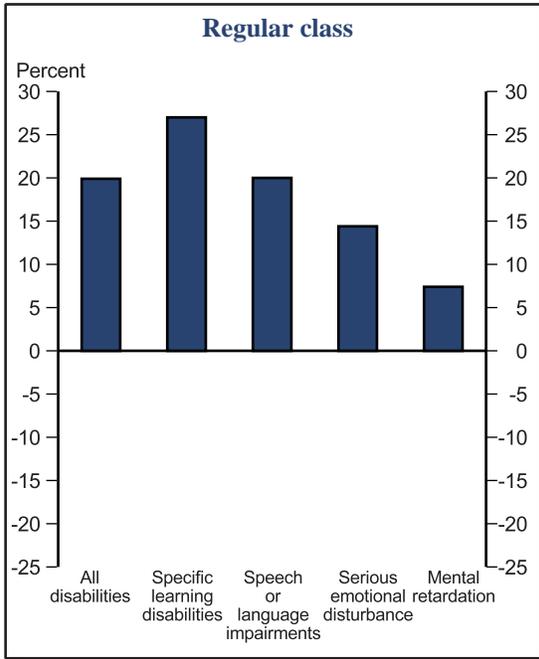
Educational environment	Academic year ending											Percentage point change
	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	
Regular class	25.5	26.4	28.9	30.5	31.5	32.8	34.9	39.8	43.4	44.5	45.4	19.9
Resource room	43.1	42.7	40.0	39.0	37.6	36.5	36.3	31.7	29.5	28.8	28.7	-14.4
Separate class	24.4	24.9	24.7	24.3	24.9	25.1	23.5	23.4	22.7	22.4	21.7	-2.7
Separate facilities	6.9	6.1	6.4	6.2	6.1	5.6	5.3	5.1	4.4	4.3	4.3	-2.6

* Based on the number of students served under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the United States and outlying areas.

NOTE: See the supplemental note to this indicator for definitions of the different educational environments and disability types. Details may not add to 100.0 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, *Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1988–1998*.

Percentage point change between the 1985–86 and 1995–96 academic years of students ages 6–21* with disabilities educated in various educational environments, by selected disability types



* Based on the number of students served under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the United States and outlying areas.

NOTE: See the supplemental note to this indicator for definitions of the different educational environments and disability types.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, *Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1988–1998*.

Table 20-1 Percentage of students with disabilities ages 6–21* according to the educational environment in which they are educated, by type of disability: Academic years ending 1986–96

Type of disability	Academic year ending											Percentage point change
	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	
Regular class												
All disabilities	25.5	26.4	28.9	30.5	31.5	32.8	34.9	39.8	43.4	44.5	45.4	19.9
Specific learning disabilities	15.4	15.9	17.6	19.6	20.7	22.5	24.7	34.8	39.3	41.1	42.4	27.0
Traumatic brain injury	—	—	—	—	—	—	7.9	16.4	22.3	26.0	28.5	20.6
Speech or language impairments	68.6	70.1	74.8	75.6	76.8	78.9	85.5	81.8	87.5	87.3	88.6	20.0
Hearing impairments	20.0	21.6	24.4	26.9	27.0	26.9	27.0	29.5	30.6	35.0	36.2	16.2
Other health impairments	27.4	30.5	30.6	29.9	31.2	30.2	35.3	40.0	40.1	42.5	43.3	15.9
Visual impairments	32.8	32.7	37.7	39.8	39.3	42.1	39.6	45.5	45.2	45.9	47.7	14.9
Serious emotional disturbance	9.1	10.2	12.6	14.1	14.9	16.8	15.9	19.6	20.5	22.0	23.5	14.4
Orthopedic impairments	28.7	24.2	27.8	29.3	29.6	29.6	32.4	35.1	37.4	39.1	40.8	12.1
Mental retardation	2.9	3.3	5.7	5.9	6.8	7.4	5.1	7.1	8.6	9.7	10.3	7.4
Autism	—	—	—	—	—	—	4.7	9.0	9.6	10.7	12.0	7.3
Multiple disabilities	2.4	4.4	6.4	7.0	5.9	6.6	6.2	7.6	9.1	9.0	9.5	7.1
Deaf-blindness	7.0	6.0	8.8	11.6	8.0	10.5	5.8	12.3	7.7	9.3	10.8	3.8
Resource room												
All disabilities	43.1	42.7	40.0	39.0	37.6	36.5	36.3	31.7	29.5	28.8	28.7	-14.4
Specific learning disabilities	62.4	60.9	59.1	57.9	56.1	53.7	54.2	43.9	41.0	39.6	39.4	-23.0
Traumatic brain injury	—	—	—	—	—	—	9.0	19.8	23.5	24.1	24.9	15.9
Speech or language impairments	26.0	23.8	19.7	19.0	17.7	13.9	9.1	10.7	7.6	7.8	6.5	-19.5
Hearing impairments	22.4	25.1	20.9	21.0	18.2	19.7	20.5	19.7	20.0	19.3	18.9	-3.5
Other health impairments	19.8	28.4	20.8	20.3	22.3	27.7	27.6	27.4	27.0	29.0	30.2	10.4
Visual impairments	25.1	29.3	25.6	25.4	23.7	23.2	21.2	21.1	21.3	21.1	20.6	-4.5
Serious emotional disturbance	34.9	35.7	32.9	30.0	28.5	29.2	27.8	26.7	25.8	24.1	23.7	-11.2
Orthopedic impairments	17.6	23.1	18.0	18.6	18.9	22.2	21.0	20.0	20.7	20.6	20.8	3.2
Mental retardation	26.2	27.0	24.0	22.4	20.1	23.0	25.4	26.8	26.2	27.1	28.6	2.4
Autism	—	—	—	—	—	—	6.9	9.6	8.1	9.3	10.7	3.8
Multiple disabilities	17.6	19.5	13.3	14.1	14.3	17.2	18.1	19.1	19.8	11.9	14.9	-2.7
Deaf-blindness	19.0	20.6	7.2	5.3	16.3	6.4	6.2	9.7	8.0	8.7	9.9	-9.1

Table 20-1 Percentage of students with disabilities ages 6–21* according to the educational environment in which they are educated, by type of disability: Academic years ending 1986–96—Continued

Type of disability	Academic year ending											Percentage point change
	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	
Separate class												
All disabilities	24.4	24.9	24.7	24.3	24.9	25.1	23.5	23.4	22.7	22.4	21.7	-2.7
Specific learning disabilities	20.7	21.1	21.7	20.9	21.7	22.4	20.0	20.1	18.8	18.4	17.4	-3.3
Traumatic brain injury	—	—	—	—	—	—	23.7	28.4	30.2	30.4	30.6	6.9
Speech or language impairments	3.7	4.1	3.8	3.8	3.8	5.7	3.9	6.0	4.5	4.6	4.5	0.8
Hearing impairments	32.6	33.1	35.2	33.5	31.7	32.7	31.2	28.1	30.6	28.6	26.8	-5.8
Other health impairments	24.5	19.8	18.7	19.6	24.6	26.2	21.4	20.6	21.3	18.5	18.4	-6.1
Visual impairments	17.9	21.3	20.8	20.3	21.1	19.9	19.6	18.0	18.3	17.2	17.1	-0.8
Serious emotional disturbance	36.2	36.9	34.6	35.8	37.1	35.8	36.9	35.2	35.3	35.2	34.3	-1.9
Orthopedic impairments	29.7	32.9	31.7	33.5	34.7	33.0	34.3	34.1	33.3	31.6	30.5	0.8
Mental retardation	56.6	58.0	57.6	58.9	61.1	58.3	59.2	56.8	57.0	55.8	54.2	-2.4
Autism	—	—	—	—	—	—	48.5	50.0	54.5	55.0	53.8	5.3
Multiple disabilities	43.2	47.6	45.9	46.2	43.7	42.8	47.1	44.6	44.1	51.3	48.8	5.6
Deaf-blindness	21.6	36.4	35.0	29.9	29.9	32.3	36.3	31.4	34.6	36.2	40.2	18.6
Separate facilities												
All disabilities	6.9	6.1	6.4	6.2	6.1	5.6	5.3	5.1	4.4	4.3	4.3	-2.6
Specific learning disabilities	1.5	2.1	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.1	1.2	0.8	0.9	0.9	-0.6
Traumatic brain injury	—	—	—	—	—	—	59.5	35.4	23.9	19.5	16.0	-43.5
Speech or language impairments	1.7	2.0	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.6	1.5	1.6	0.4	0.4	0.4	-1.3
Hearing impairments	25.0	20.3	19.5	18.6	23.1	20.7	21.3	22.7	18.9	17.1	18.2	-6.8
Other health impairments	28.4	21.3	29.9	30.1	21.9	15.9	15.6	12.0	11.6	10.0	8.2	-20.2
Visual impairments	24.2	16.7	15.9	14.5	15.9	14.8	19.6	15.5	15.3	15.8	14.6	-9.6
Serious emotional disturbance	19.8	17.2	20.0	20.1	19.5	18.3	19.5	18.5	18.4	18.7	18.6	-1.2
Orthopedic impairments	24.0	19.8	22.5	18.7	16.8	15.2	12.3	10.8	8.7	8.7	8.0	-16.0
Mental retardation	14.2	11.7	12.8	12.8	12.1	11.4	10.3	9.3	8.3	7.4	7.0	-7.2
Autism	—	—	—	—	—	—	39.9	31.3	27.8	25.0	23.5	-16.4
Multiple disabilities	36.7	28.5	34.4	32.7	36.1	33.3	28.6	28.8	27.1	27.8	26.8	-9.9
Deaf-blindness	52.4	37.1	48.9	53.2	45.9	50.8	51.6	46.7	49.7	45.8	39.1	-13.3

— Not available.

* Based on the number of students served under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), in the United States and outlying areas.

NOTE: Disability types are listed in order of greatest to least increase in being served in a regular classroom. See the supplemental note to this indicator for definitions of the different educational environments and disability types.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, *Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1988–1998*.

Educational environments and types of disabilities

The educational environments described in *Indicator 20* are defined by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, as follows:

- *Regular class*: A student with a disability is educated in a regular class if he or she is removed from regular classes to receive special education and related services for less than 21 percent of the school day.
- *Resource room*: A student with a disability is educated in a resource room if he or she receives special education and related services outside the regular class for 21 to 60 percent of the school day.
- *Separate class*: A student with a disability is educated in a separate class if he or she receives special education and related services outside the regular class for more than 60 percent of the school day.
- *Separate facilities*: A student with a disability is educated in a separate facility if he or she does not attend school with his or her nondisabled peers; instead, he or she is educated either in a separate day school, a residential facility, or a homebound/hospital setting.

The 12 disability types presented in *Indicator 20* are classified according to federal law, under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and are defined below.

- *Autism*: a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age 3, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences.
- *Deaf-blindness*: concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational problems that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.
- *Hearing impairments*: an impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance, in the most severe case because the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing.
- *Mental retardation*: significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects a child's educational performance.
- *Multiple disabilities*: concomitant impairments (such as mental retardation-blindness, mental retardation-orthopedic impairment, etc.), the combination of which causes such severe educational problems that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include deaf-blindness.
- *Orthopedic impairments*: a severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by congenital anomaly (e.g., clubfoot, absence of some member, etc.), impairments caused by disease (e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis, etc.), and impairments from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures).
- *Other health impairments*: having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, due to chronic or acute health problems such as a heart condition, tuberculosis, rheumatic fever, nephritis, asthma, sickle cell anemia, hemophilia, epilepsy, lead poisoning, leukemia, or diabetes that adversely affects a child's educational performance.
- *Serious emotional disturbance*: a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:
 - (a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors;
 - (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;

- (c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;
- (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or
- (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

The term includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have a serious emotional disturbance.

- *Specific learning disabilities*: a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not apply to children who have learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.
- *Speech or language impairments*: a communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance.
- *Traumatic brain injury*: an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more areas, such as cognition; language; memory; attention; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment; problem-solving; sensory, perceptual, and motor abilities; psychosocial behavior; physical functions; information processing; and speech. The term does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative, or brain injuries induced by birth trauma.
- *Visual impairments*: an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, *Twentieth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*, 1998, Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Section 300.7, 1995.